

ARTICLE APPEARED
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February 1986The real story behind that
Soviet combat brigade in Cuba

The STUPIDITY of 'Intelligence'

by Stansfield Turner

'The most profound disappointment of my presidency,' Jimmy Carter said of the failure to secure Senate ratification of the SALT II agreement. He had staked his presidential prestige and, to a significant extent, his political future on the signing and ratification of the treaty. While many factors combined to put Senate ratification in doubt, the White House thought the prospects hopeful even in an election year; hopeful that is, until an intelligence failure concerning the report of a brigade of Soviet troops in Cuba caused a political uproar that seriously damaged the chances for passage of SALT II. Here, Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA at the time, gives his account of the mishandling of the report and the unnecessary damage it caused.

Technology has so increased the amount of information we can acquire that a whole new set of problems has resulted. On the one hand, analysts are inundated with data and must find ways to filter, store, and retrieve what is significant. On the other hand, analysts must be concerned with whether they are receiving everything that is collected in their area of interest; with whether the members of the intelligence

community—the CIA's espionage branch, the NSA [National Security Agency], the Defense organizations responsible for overhead reconnaissance, the CIA's electronic surveillance component, the State Department's diplomatic reporting system, the FBI's foreign intelligence branch, the Defense Intelligence Agency's [DIA] attaches, the intelligence organizations of the military services, and the intelligence offices of the departments of Treasury, Energy, and the Drug Enforcement Agency—all share what they collect. An unfortunate example of information not being shared adequately came in the summer of 1979. It led to the most serious intelligence failure of my tenure. The failure to forecast the fall of the Shah earlier that year was of far less significance than our mishandling of the report that a "combat brigade" of Soviet troops was in Cuba. Had we predicted the Shah's fall from power even six or seven months ahead of time, there was little the United States could have done to prevent it. The reporting on the combat brigade, however, did play a direct part in scuttling the SALT II arms control treaty with the Soviet Union.

In June 1979 President Carter had met with President Brezhnev and signed the SALT II treaty. The Senate was preparing to hold its initial hearings on ratification when, on July 18, the *Washington Star* reported, "Sen. Richard Stone,

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